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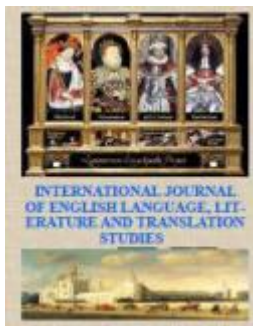
ROAD MAP TO A SYLLABUS DESIGN FOR THE RECEPTIVE SKILLS OF LISTENING AND READING

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ABSTRACT

Communication skills have become the de facto criterion for the engineering professionals. In the context of globalization, to be a competent communicator, proficiency in English is imperative. Language is the integration of four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing and these skills can be divided into receptive and productive ones. Listening and reading enriches the language learning process and also crucial for the development of cognitive skills. The significance of the receptive skills in enhancing language competency is neglected and has resulted in weak understanding and production of spoken and written language. The effectiveness of the instruction lies on identifying the specific language needs of the learners and clearly defined objectives. This research aims at finding out the essential receptive skills to be acquired by the learners for the accomplishment of success in both the academic and professional life.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this globalized era Communication skills have become the de facto criterion for the engineering professionals to succeed in the world of work. English being the widespread and dominant language in the world is the prime form of communication in the field of commerce and technology. It is also considered, the language of science in the international level. An in-depth understanding and knowledge of the appropriate use of the English language are essential to communicate more effectively in this globalized world.

In India a multilingual country, the English language has transformed from a link language into a language of opportunity. But the teaching and learning of the English language remains challenging because of social and economical factors. Irrespective of inadequate English language exposure and competence students from vernacular medium schools are getting enrolled in the engineering institutions. As the learners fail to acquire the *expected* level of competence through the English courses offered by the institution, the effectiveness of the same comes under scanner.

More over in recent years it is extremely disturbing to learn that merely a small fraction of graduate engineers are employable. In the National Employability Report for 2014 Aspiring Minds an employee assessment service provider has expressed that the low employability among engineering graduates is a cumulative outcome of poor education standards and higher demand of skilled employees has created a drastic skill gap in the country. According to the survey out of 1.2 lakh candidates, 73.63% lack English speaking and comprehension skills. This situation warrants a fresh insight on the content and the methods teaching and learning the English language in the context of the present globalized environment.

2. **LANGUAGE SKILLS**

Language is the integration of four basic skills listening, speaking, reading and writing and these can be categorized into receptive and productive skills. Listening and reading are the receptive skills and speaking and writing are the productive skills. Listening is the receptive skill in the spoken mode and reading in the written mode.

The receptive and productive skills are two interconnected strands around which the English language is structured. The skills are interwoven in such a way that the achievement of objectives in each strand contributes to the progression of other skills. Building receptive skills contribute to the development of productive skills and vice versa.

The educational infrastructure in our country has often been criticized for not leaving much space for critical thinking and creative use of the English language. English language teaching was synonymous to grasping of the grammatical rules for many decades. The examinations test only the knowledge about the language rather than assessing the ability to use the language. Engineering students especially those from rural background encounter a plethora of problems while getting enrolled in the technical institutions and the most common one is the language shock they experience. Most of the students fail to acquire the verbal foundations for learning the English language throughout their academic life and they fall short of proficiency as they proceed to their career.

The engineering professionals need to encounter a range of situations from responding to simple instructions to analysing and making inferences on a variety of complex documents and presentations. The mastery of listening and reading skill will enable them to understand the message or text and make appropriate response.

2.1 RECEPTIVE SKILLS

The receptive language skills tend to develop the expressive abilities of the learners. Effective receptive skills ameliorate the language competence of the learners. *"the transfer of linguistic knowledge from receptive to productive is probably a relatively slow process, but it does take place, as the study of language acquisition shows." Wilkins (1984: 1 00).* Though the listening and reading are considered as passive skills it is not so actually. Listening is not just hearing sounds and reading is not just giving voice to printed material. The mind actively engages in identifying the main ideas, constructing meanings, distinguishing the facts from opinion, interpreting data etcetera while listening and reading. A significant part of learning takes place through listening and reading. A comprehensible input of spoken and written language would serve as a model for effective output of speaking and writing.

2.1.1 Listening

Listening is a life skill that extends far beyond the academic and professional need. According to Shelagh Rixon listening is not synonymous with hearing "the recognition of sounds implies conscious attention to the message of what is said" Shelagh Rixon (1986). Effective listening helps to extract, understand and evaluate the information. Generally the listening process includes five distinct stages receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding.

For academic purpose students should be able to identify and comprehend the main ideas within and across texts during classroom lectures, and also understand execute the specific instructions given in the laboratory. Recognising the sounds of the language and distinguishing between them, understanding the order and arrangement of words and the ability to distinguish the words and their meaning are the prerequisite

basic skills on which the learner could build higher order listening skills. Learners at the tertiary level science and technology institution need to make meaning of increasingly complex texts by identifying the text structures and specific patterns and interpret the same. Anderson and Lynch (1988) suggested that processes of active interpretation are involved in effective listening. . An increasing knowledge of the conventions of text helps in making and supporting the inferences from the text.

2.1.2 Reading

Generally reading is done for both information and pleasure and the reading materials differ in content and style. The speed of reading differs with the purpose of reading. Learners have to develop the skill of differentiating the main and subordinate ideas or illustrations for the purpose of adjusting the reading speed.

Reading is a complex skill involving a variety of sub skills like skimming, scanning, summarizing, identifying the discourse markers and mastering the same will enhance and enrich the language learning process. Identifying the key words of the text and understanding the contextual meaning of the word, recognizing the structure and organisation of texts and understanding the relationship between the facts and the arguments will ensure a high level of comprehension.

At tertiary level reading not only involves literal understanding of the text but also the critical interpretation and evaluation. Discriminating facts from opinions, identifying persuasive elements, understanding the force and validity of arguments are the key factors for effective interpretation of any document.

Technical documents do not only contain texts but also variety of pictorial representations like diagrams, flowcharts, tables etcetera. Proper understanding of the graphical representations is the key for effective interpretation of the document.

But reading and listening as key receptive skills in acquiring the language competency remain neglected. Despite the fact that the technical English curriculum includes listening and reading comprehension it is limited to find answers for simple questions. "Thus, alongside general comprehension of lexis, they also need micro-skills including skimming, scanning, prediction, distinguishing important information and understanding textual organization." (Carrel & Carson,1997). Though the technical English curriculum had been revised and includes all the four basic language skills, very little impact have been made *in* the enhancement of the language competence of the learners. Despite the inclusion of communication skills in the engineering curriculum the potential remains unrealized in the absence of well defined objectives. After working for a long three hours in the language lab for several weeks, the students are unprepared to interact with their peers in English (Al Muzzamil Fareen, J. 2013)

In light of the adverse comments, the situation warrants refocus on the approaches of English language teaching and it becomes essential to design an inclusive curriculum by conducting a fresh needs analysis survey taking into account all the relevant factors to bridge the gap between skill level of the learners and the renewed expectations of the industry. "The EAP programme may need to refocus its approach to critical reading and listening and help students move beyond seeking answers to surface level questions about who-what- when-where-why" (Rosenblatt,1988).The basic skills of the English language have to be strengthened with relevance to the emerging needs of the industry. The effectiveness of the instruction lies on identifying the specific language needs of the learners and clearly defined objectives. There should be continuous analysis and revision of materials in the light of experience. Needs analysis is a starting point or a guide for course design, syllabus design, materials selection, assessment or even classroom activities.

3.   **NEEDS ANALYSIS**

A curriculum is designed as a response to the needs of the learners. These needs are translated into learning objectives. Learning objectives describe specific learning outcomes, what students should achieve from their involvement in a particular subject area over a specified time frame. The present situation demands a Technical English course designed with clearly defined objectives taking into consideration the social, and the educational background of the students and the demands of the industry. By 'objectives', Widdowson means

'the pedagogic intentions of a particular course of study to be achieved within the period of that course, which is measurable by some assessment device at the end of the course. (Widdowson, 1983: 6-7).Since learning a language is not just a mental process but a process of negotiation between individuals and society, the conclusions of needs analysis in EAP are constantly checked and re-assessed according to individual and social changes (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).As enumerated in the bloom's taxonomy the levels of objectives go from the simplest to the most complex and each level assumes the preceding level. Thus, the cognitive domain comprises the following six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation.

Needs-analysis should be seen as an indispensable aspect of ESP syllabus design in order to link the present students' academic needs with their needs in their prospective employment. Needs-analysis involves not only the students but also all parties in the educational system and relevant user institutions that ultimately employ students and the present employees of these institutions.

3.1 Method

This researcher has identified the essential listening and reading skills to be imparted to the learners through unstructured interviews and informal discussions with the English language teachers of various Engineering Colleges and classroom observations. The need analysis questionnaire for listening and reading skills was administered to 400 participants (100 students of the various engineering colleges situated in urban and rural areas, 100 English language teachers and 100 other subject teachers of various Engineering Colleges and 100 employees of Multinational companies).

4.　　　RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1　　Listening Skills

The completed needs analysis questionnaires for listening skills were collected and are presented in Table 1. Figure 1 represent the average score obtained through questionnaire.

Table 1. Listening Skills

S.No.	OBJECTIVES	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Very Fair	Fair
1	comprehend spoken English in the form of classroom lectures and instructions in the laboratory/work shop	286	112	2	0	0
2	distinguish words and their meanings	317	83	0	0	0
3	identify the specific patterns used in a lecture	305	94	1	0	0
4	locate specific details in a lecture or a talk	256	144	0	0	0
5	develop an ability to repeat the main ideas after listening to a lecture or a talk	323	71	3	2	1
6	develop competence to organize the given oral ideas logically	294	93	11	2	0
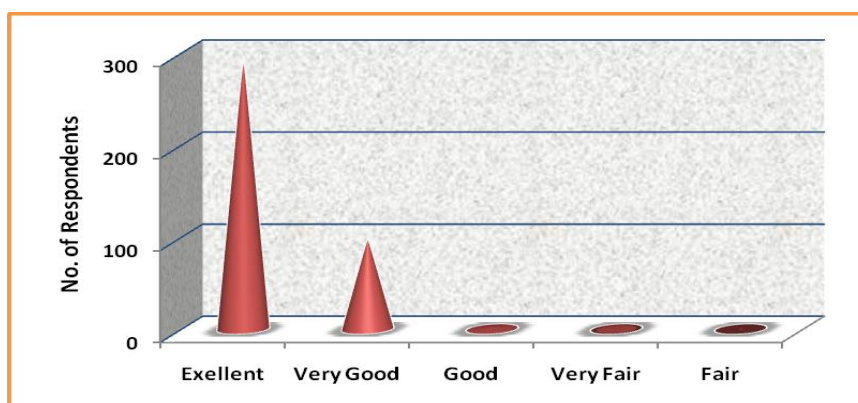
Figure 1. Average score for listening skills

The responses obtained pertaining to the specific listening skills to be acquired is highly affirmative. A considerable number of participants have agreed that comprehension of spoken English in the form of classroom lectures is extremely essential. Relatively a high number of participants are of the view that the ability to repeat the main ideas after listening to a lecture is an important skill to be developed. Also it is very much evident from the data that the learners should acquire the skill of organizing the ideas received orally in a logical sequence for the purpose of retaining and recalling at a later stage. Identifying the specific patterns in the lectures and locating specific details are also considered as important listening skills to be acquired. The participants' response reflects the importance of distinguishing the words uttered and understanding the contextual meaning of the same.

4.2 Reading Skills

The completed needs analysis questionnaires for reading skills were collected and are presented in Table 2. Figure 2 represent the average score obtained through questionnaire.

Table 2. Reading Skills

S. No.	OBJECTIVES	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Very Fair	Fair
1	read with an average speed attaining a minimum speed failing which comprehension of ideas will suffer	213	143	15	10	2
2	learn to adjust speed to matter and purpose of reading	178	194	14	11	4
3	identify the key-words	318	81	0	1	0
4	relate the correct meaning to the terms or words used	275	116	14	2	3
5	read with global comprehension or overall organization of ideas	252	138	8	2	0
6	perceive the way a text is organized (part-whole and part-part relationships of facts, arguments and generalizations)	337	58	3	2	0
7	recall the main facts	364	31	4	0	1
8	read with local comprehension (comprehend particular details)	342	49	9	0	0
9	follow the guidelines and suggestions	288	97	7	5	3
10	make inferences	372	27	1	0	0
11	assimilate a variety of information	354	43	2	0	1
12	discriminate facts	316	79	4	1	0
13	evaluate critically any reading material	329	68	3	0	0
14	identify a bias or weakness in the argument	316	81	3	0	0
15	assess the force of an argument or the conclusiveness of evidence	276	112	9	3	0
16	distinguish facts form opinions	330	62	7	1	0
17	use reference manuals/diagrammatic representations of verbal statements and vice-versa	374	24	2	0	0
18	interpret rules and instructions	336	36	24	3	1

From the findings it is evident that, the learners along with the general comprehension of the text should also acquire sub skills of reading like discrimination of facts, distinguishing facts from opinions, making inferences identifying the keywords and relate the correct meaning of the terms with the context. Understanding the textual organization and reading with global comprehension of overall ideas has been

agreed upon as an essential reading skill by a large number of participants. Responses to the skills like developing mind maps while reading, interpreting rules, understanding the pictorial representations shows that the respondents believe that these are the necessary language competencies to be acquired by the learners. Critical evaluation of the text and assessing the force of the argument are rated as indispensable reading skills.
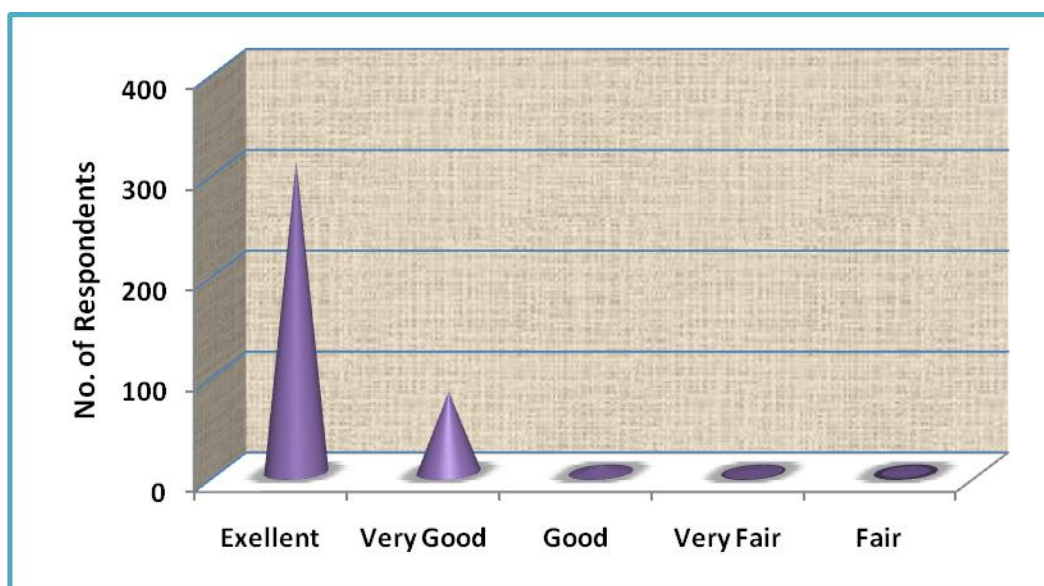

Figure 2. Average score for reading skills

CONCLUSION

Listening and reading are undoubtedly the fundamental components of interpersonal communication. It is evident from the above findings that the incorporation of the above stated listening and reading skills as objectives in the curriculum will ensure the mastery of the English language and also success in academic and professional life. Receptive language development needs to be a major focus of teaching English as second language .Engaging the learners in language rich environment and involving them in the activities designed to meet the objectives in listening and speaking will result in positive learning outcome.

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